

Governor Champions Faith-Based Prison Initiative 'PLUS' Program Hopes To Stop Repeat Offenders

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“I assume the very best about you like I do about every citizen and I am rooting for you very, very hard.”

- Gov. Mitch Daniels

PENDLETON, Ind. -- Hoosiers got their first look Tuesday at a new faith-based program designed to keep criminal offenders from going back to their old ways once they leave prison, RTV6's Norman Cox reported.

It's called the "PLUS" program. That stands for Purposeful Living Units Serve. It segregates offenders who volunteer for intensive religious and/or character training.

The program is controversial with some, such as the Indiana Civil Liberties Union, which views it as an unconstitutional mixing of church and state.

But Gov. Mitch Daniels thinks so highly of PLUS that he gave a pep talk to the first enrollees at the correctional industrial facility in Pendleton Tuesday.

Daniels gave a rousing speech, saying he believes we're all sinners who could wind up in a place like this. He thanked the men for taking part in the pilot program.

"You didn't have to do it. I can't know if it's gonna work for you or not. I can't even know if you're 100 percent sincere in being here, but I sure assume it," Daniels said. "I assume the very best about you like I do about every citizen and I am rooting for you very, very hard."

Inmates who join are put in segregated quarters where they engage in intensive study of character building programs with volunteer mentors.

"We've just been working on anger management and understanding oneself and how to deal with conflict," program volunteer Lorine Combs said.

There are two paths. The "faith" program is based upon religious instruction from any of a number of faiths. The "character" program, for the non-religious, deals with secular materials. But participants in both said it's helping make them better people.

"In order to be encouraged to change, we need to feel hope. And a lot of times we get our hope from people when we know that they believe in us," Jasahn Larosa, enrolled in the faith program, said.

"This is my second time coming through the system, and I feel like I need to change, because I can't do this any more," Anthony Carbonatto said. "I can't do it by myself."

Correction officials said other states using the program have been successful in reducing the recidivism rate.

In Indiana, 38 percent of released inmates commit new crimes and return.

"Folks, I'm not satisfied with that number. We need to do a better job," Indiana Department of Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue said. "We need to do a better job for the taxpayers. We need to do a better job for the offenders that are currently in the system."

There are three pilot programs for PLUS, one for the men at Pendleton, one at the women's prison in Indianapolis and one at the juvenile facility in Plainfield.

If they show success, Daniels hopes to expand the program statewide.

Event Photos

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